

Testimony of Congressman John Boozman

United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources

“Facing the Methamphetamine Problem in America” July 18, 2003

Chairman Souder, Ranking Member Cummings and Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify before you this morning on the important issue of methamphetamine.

Methamphetamine poses problems of epidemic proportions across the country. My own State of Arkansas has the highest number of meth lab seizures per capita in the nation. Arkansas has become a crossroads for meth production and trafficking, making meth one of the top law-enforcement problems in the state.

As a father of three daughters and a former member of the Rogers School Board, I am very aware of our nation's drug problem. Years ago, the problem seemed like something that was far from the small towns and communities of my state. Today, that has all changed.

The National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse has reported that the rate of drug use among teens in rural America is now higher than in the nation's large urban centers. At the same time, mid-size cities and rural areas are less equipped to deal with the consequences of drug use.

In a survey of the counties in my district, law enforcement reported that an estimated 75% of all crime is related to methamphetamine. As we all know, drug use is not a victimless crime. In fact, most people arrested for meth related crimes in my region have small children. Just yesterday I heard a report of an 18-year-old girl who turned her parents in for cooking meth in their home. Her parents had been cooking meth for years, but she waited until after her 18th birthday to turn her parents in because she wanted to have the ability to take custody of her younger brother and sister. In another case, police raided a heavily armed meth lab and discovered that a baby living in the drug trailer had been left alone and had eaten the drugs left strewn about the trailer. Clearly, this should serve as a wake-up call to parents, community leaders and policy makers across the country. There is no doubt that additional resources are needed to combat the damage that is being done to our society.

This becomes clear when you look at the statistics. In 1994, a total of 6 meth labs were seized in Arkansas. In 2002, 955 labs were seized. And, today, law enforcement officials have busted 25% more labs than they did this time last year. The average cost to clean up a lab in Arkansas is \$1,900 and that is in addition to the equipment and training

needed for local law enforcement to even be able to safely enter the crime scene. After the DEA and local law enforcement have removed the physical hazardous materials from the crime scene, the area is still contaminated from the chemicals and requires further mitigation by the property owner. When you sell your home in Arkansas, part of the realtor's disclosure is whether or not your property has been contaminated by a meth lab. You can clearly see that the meth problem in Arkansas has reached epidemic proportions.

What can we do help?

After talking to everyone in my district from the state police and local sheriffs to county judges, drug courts, prosecutors and treatment facilities - I believe we must facilitate a balanced approach to combating the problem of methamphetamine in America. This approach must include demand reduction, prevention, enforcement and treatment. We must educate the public, reduce the availability of ingredients, provide the resources for law enforcement and then make the effort to fully rehabilitate the addicts.

This is why I am a proud co-sponsor of H.R. 834, the CLEAN-UP Meth Act. This bill authorizes grants for educational purposes, creates tougher penalties for offenders, provides law enforcement with grants for training and equipment acquisition, and it also authorizes grants for treatment. I am pleased that Mr. Ose's legislation takes a balanced approach in combating such a broad and difficult problem.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this opportunity to speak for the Third District of Arkansas and give you a brief glimpse of the magnitude of the problem we are dealing with on a daily basis. I commend your Committee for focusing on this problem and I give my greatest thanks to all of the officers, agents, prosecutors, judges, and counselors who are on the front lines fighting against methamphetamine everyday.

Thank you.